

A study of trauma in the select novels of Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*

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Abstract

This paper examines the exile existence of an individual in their own land in Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance*. Fact and fiction coexist as a post-Oslo portrait of life in Ghaza is painted, with a particular emphasis on the lives of four Palestinian women. The limitation on their lives caused by the Israeli occupation is akin to the outmoded social demands on them. Khalifeh condemns both colonial military forces and the similarly oppressive patriarchal rules that Palestinian women are subjected to twice: first as women in patriarchal societies, and then as politically colonised women. The study aims to dissect Khalifeh's portrayal of political realities and the ways in which they intersect with the characters' personal journeys and *Persepolis* portrayal of a captivating glimpse into the tumultuous period of the Islamic Revolution in Iran during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The narrative revolves around Marjane, a spirited and modern girl, navigating the profound impact of war, religious extremism, and societal transformations on the Iranian populace, with a particular focus on women. Marjane's coming-of-age story unfolds against the backdrop of the toppling of the Shah of Iran, the rise of an authoritarian fundamentalist dictatorship, and the tragic Iran-Iraq war. The trauma has been visualized as aiming to unravel the intricate relationship between politics and personal identity in both the novels of Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, shedding light on the broader socio-political landscape of the Palestinian experience and experiences growing up during the Islamic rebellion in Iran and the effects of conflict and religious fundamentalism on Iranians, particularly women.

Keywords

Inheritance, Trauma, Subjugation, Post-Oslo picture, Patriarchy, Exile life, Identity

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1. Introduction

The proposed research endeavors to delve into the intricate layers of Sahar Khalifeh's novel, "The Inheritance," unraveling its profound cultural, political and identity related themes. At the core of this exploration lies a keen examination of the translation process, particularly the crucial role played by Aida Bamia in bringing Khalifeh's work to a global audience. Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance* juxtaposes fact with fiction, painting a post-Oslo image of life in Ghaza, with a special emphasis on the lives of four Palestinian women. The limitation on their lives caused by the Israeli occupation is akin to the outmoded social demands on them. Khalifeh critiques both colonial armed forces and similarly oppressive patriarchal rules by depicting their battles within the larger Palestinian misery.

2. Cultural Tapestry

Khalifeh's narrative skillfully weaves a tapestry of Palestinian culture, offering readers a glimpse into the nuances that shape the characters' lives. The study aims to dissect these cultural elements, exploring how they contribute to the overall richness

of the novel. By immersing ourselves in the traditions, customs, and historical context embedded in the text, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural landscape that serves as the backdrop to the characters' experiences. According to *The Inheritance*, Palestinian women are subjected to two forms of oppression: first as women in patriarchal society, and second as politically colonized women. Those Palestinian women's experiences under Israeli occupation, as well as their society's harsh social rules, make their quest for identification more difficult than normal, and self-fulfillment nearly unattainable.

3. Political Undercurrents

"The Inheritance" unfolds against the backdrop of political turmoil, providing a lens through which to examine the impact of conflict on individual lives. The research seeks to dissect Khalifeh's portrayal of political realities and the ways in which they intersect with the characters' personal journeys. Through this analysis, we aim to unravel the intricate relationship between politics and personal identity in the novel, shedding light on the broader socio-political landscape of the Palestinian experience. Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* is a harsh investigation of the lives of Palestinians in exile and in

their homeland in the 1990s, following Oslo. It is also a world where the first Gulf War has just ended and a large number of Palestinians who previously worked in Kuwait or Iraq have returned home. Khalifeh's major triumph in this novel is that she gives voice to diverse Palestinian people in various situations, the most important of which are female characters who have previously been underrepresented in literature.

Zaynab or Zayna is the protagonist in *The Inheritance*. Zayna, who was born in the United States to a Palestinian father and an American mother, has spent her childhood torn between two cultures. Pregnant at fifteen, which her father was prepared to kill her for, she flees her father and his Arabic culture and moves in with her American grandma. She instills the American half of her persona in order to become a successful anthropologist. Zayna's successful professional life, however, does not heal a fundamental divide in her character caused by the traumas of the past. In her forties, she resolves to return to Palestine to see her ailing father and learn more about her heritage.

The protagonist, Zayna product of an American mother and a Palestinian father is confronted by situations of the sort that arise in culturally diverse families, regardless of the country of origin of the parents. A constant search for identity is shared among the children of such families, who are torn between two worlds and struggle to adapt to one or the other. For immigrant families from developing countries, the challenge of living in the United States is significant even when both parents belong to the same culture. For children pulled in two different directions, with each parent trying to assimilate them to his/her culture, the difficulties can be insurmountable.

Khalifeh addresses many of those issues in *al-Mirath*. The novel explores some of the consequences for Palestinian women of the year of the Nakba (1948), when men found themselves unable to sustain their families. Young women just out of high school stepped up and gladly chose to work in distant lands, assuming the role of the breadwinner. Many of these women helped brothers and sisters acquire higher degrees and succeed in their professional lives, but their siblings, in turn, often paid scant attention to the young women responsible for their success. Often these women sacrificed their futures to guarantee that of their Siblings, turning down marriage proposals to provide for their families. It is this poignant aspect of the first generation of Palestinian young women that Khalifeh artfully portrays, delving deep into the psyche of that generation through the character of Nahleh and providing a frank and often raw description of her experience and feelings.

4. Identity Exploration

The characters in Khalifeh's novel grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and self-discovery. This research aims to scrutinize the multifaceted nature of identity depicted in "The Inheritance." By navigating the characters' struggles and triumphs, we can gain insights into the ways in which Khalifeh

captures the complexities of identity formation within the context of cultural and political upheaval. Zayna returns home to Palestine and meets her uncle Abu Jabber, the father of two exiled refugees who are unable to return, Mazen, an idealistic rebel named Guevara, Kamal, a German scientist, Said, a slow-witted merchant, and finally Nahleh, a bitter fifty-year-old spinster who had given up her entire career working in Kuwait for the sake of her family. Zayna also meets Violet, a sensitive single Christian lady who is frustrated by her inability to settle down and marry Mazen and is smothered by gossip. She also meets Futna, her young stepmother, who has her husband (Zayna's father) forcibly inseminated in an Israeli hospital to ensure a larger share of the fortune. She meets Sitt Amira, Futna's mother, who represents the older generation.

As events unfold and connect, the characters gradually unveil themselves. Some chapters are told in the first person singular by Zayna, while others are told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. The plot is controlled by three lines: Futna's pregnancy through artificial insemination and the inheritance issue it brings, Kamal's sewage factory designed to initiate an economic renaissance in Palestine, and Mazen and Zayna's cultural centre launched to combat the colonial erasure of indigenous culture.

All of this takes place in Wadi Alrihan, which is tensely opposed by Kirat Rahil, a Jewish hamlet. On the one hand, Wadi Alrihan is a place without security and infrastructure. It is the aftermath of the first Intifada, and people are tired of too many fatalities and hope for a brighter future. On the other hand, the money lovers hope for larger slices of the cake and are active in all types of commercial enterprises. It is a moment of change and promise, and both militants and liberal women appear to be undesirable. After Kamal, the scientist, abandons the sewage plant, it turns into an environmental calamity. The cultural center's inauguration becomes a disaster when they forget to number the tickets/seats and massive crowds enter by force. Stray rats from the factory tamper with the people attending the party, resulting in utter anarchy. Because Wadi Alrihan lies so close to the Jewish town Kirat Rahil, Israeli security personnel have surrounded the region to prevent conflict. Futna gives birth in the middle of the celebration and begins to haemorrhage. She is bleeding to death as a result of the Israeli blockade. The tale concludes with Sitt Amira giving her grandson to the furious Israeli troops in the blockade, sarcastically praising them for their efforts in both insemination and killing her daughter.

Khalifeh's stories about Zayna (and Kamal) address the various and tough political and social situations that Palestinians in the Diaspora face. Despite being married to an American, Zayna's father never became a real citizen. Because his daughter violated "his honour" by becoming pregnant at the age of fifteen, he uses harsh threats to force her to live a doubtful life and become a permanent immigrant. All for his macho "honour. The same thing happened to Huda, a girl who elopes because she is afraid for her life after falling pregnant as a teenager. It is the issue of living in one place while adopting

another's mentality. A similar incident occurs in Palestine, where the fifty-year-old Nahleh had an affair with the realtor and is humiliated by her brother Mazen. In all three situations, the fiery males are frequently permitted the same freedom that their female counterparts are denied. Khalifeh criticises the hypocritical moral standard that forces women to live in the diaspora.

She realises that language is the first instrument for understanding others and begins to teach her native tongue through cassettes and books. Spoken language becomes insufficient for the quest, so she studies classical Arabic, only to discover that it does not best represent personal sentiments and concerns; only colloquial language does. She finally switches back to colloquial, losing track of the distinction between the two. Khalifeh appears to be arguing against the slippery nature of words, particularly for women, who are frequently silenced. Zayna begins as a woman stuck between two worlds and finishes similarly.

In Wadi Alrihan, Zayna becomes aware of her situation as a single Palestinian woman in that society, and she recognises similarities between herself, Futna, Nahleh, and Violet: all are victims of double oppression. Khalifeh's is mostly an existential stance on life. Zayna's estrangement will never stop. Despite a few moments of warmth and understanding, it simply becomes deeper and wider. The characters are restless and insecure throughout the tale. This includes Zayna, Mazen, Kamal, Violet, Nahleh, Futna, and even the older generation of Abu Jabber and Sitt Amira.

5. Translation as a Bridge

Aida Bamia's translation acts as a vital bridge, connecting Khalifeh's narrative with a global readership. The study seeks to analyze the translation process, exploring how linguistic choices impact the conveyance of cultural nuances. By assessing the effectiveness of Bamia's translation, we aim to understand how the global reception of "The Inheritance" is influenced by the translator's decisions in rendering the original text into a different linguistic and cultural context.

6. Persepolis: The Childhood Story of Marjane Satrapi

Persepolis: A childhood story. Persepolis begins by introducing Marjane, the ten-year-old protagonist. The novel, set in 1980, is about her childhood memories during Iran's Islamic Revolution. Her tale explores the consequences of conflict and religious fundamentalism on Iranians, particularly women. Marjane "Marji" Satrapi is an intellectual, lively, and highly modern child who lives with her parents in Iran's capital of Tehran during the turbulent time of Iranian history from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Marji recounts her childhood in Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood, primarily from the ages of 10 and fourteen. This tale describes how Marji and her family witnessed and were influenced by volatile events such as the Islamic revolution's fall of Iran's authoritarian Shah,

the oppressive fundamentalist dictatorship that succeeded the Shah, and the devastating Iran-Iraq War. The country's wealth has long made it a target for outside invaders, but the Islamic revolution of 1979 overthrew the Shah's Western-backed administration. The revolution has resulted in a new Islamic dictatorship that is causing huge societal changes that affect how individuals are expected to behave, including Marji and her family. Marji is struggling to adjust to the changes at her liberal French bilingual school, which has become more rigorous. Girls must wear veils, and female and male students are now divided. Marji's wealthy and modern parents, her father, Ebi, and her mother, Taji, participate in the large rallies against the new regime's harsh behaviour restrictions (much as they did against the Shah's regime). Marji's parents are concerned when a photo of her mother at a demonstration surfaces in newspapers and magazines. Later, following an increasingly violent rally, the Satrapis determine that open protesting is too risky to continue. Marji struggles to reconcile her highly spiritual beliefs with her parents' austere modernism. Marji talks to God at night and has believed in her ability to become a prophet since she was six years old. However, the revolution forces Marji to set aside her dreams in favour of studying and imitating protestors and revolutionaries. She imitates protestors in her garden and examines books about famous revolutionaries and thinkers provided to her by her parents. She aspires to be a hero and wants her parents to be heroes as well. Marji's relationship with God deteriorates as she realises she and God have less to talk about though God continues to visit her on occasion. Marji is overjoyed to discover that her family history is full with rebels. She discovers that her grandpa was a royal and later a communist who the Shah deposed, and that her uncle Anoosh, also a communist, spent nine years in prison during the Shah's reign. Marji spends a brief time with Anoosh, learning about his background. Anoosh was released from prison when the Shah was deposed in 1979, but when Islamic fundamentalists seized control, they pursued Anoosh, imprisoned him, and eventually executed him. Marji is devastated that her new idol has been killed. She abandons her trust in God and begins to question the pro-regime propaganda she hears, particularly at school.

7. The Loss of Innocence during Coming of Age

Persepolis is typically about a young lady coming of age, and for Marji, this process is punctuated by events that gradually erode her innocence. Her father admits this process when he informs Marji in "The Water Cell" that he believes she is old enough to comprehend certain concepts. Young Marji believes the Shah was selected by God because that is what her instructor informed her. When Marji's father tells her the truth, it is a watershed event in her development. She not only learns about the brutal realities of Middle Eastern geopolitics, but she also has to consider the power dynamics that would lead her teacher to "lie" to her about it. This encounter under-

mines Marji's innocence and teaches her to be more critical in the future. The same sequence of events occurs repeatedly. Her mother's encounter with individuals who threaten to rape her demonstrates how nasty and opportunistic people can be. Uncle Anoush's execution shows Marji that her heroes have flaws. Marji's meeting with the Guardians of the Revolution near the end of the novel demonstrates that living as a woman in Iran is fraught with the constant possibility of losing everything.

8. The Iranian regime's cannibalistic nature

Persepolis often mentions the Iranian regime's strategies for maintaining power, which cannibalise its own society. The regime depends on its population to survive, but it also feeds on and destroys them. To maintain track of its inhabitants, the regime relies on information from the general population. The Revolutionary Guards patrol the streets. Neighbours keep an eye out for evidence of illegal activity. In other words, the dictatorship sets Iranians against one another in order to keep control over the population. The regime's tactics have a devastating impact on people and society as a whole. The same is true for the regime's actions during the Iraq War. It understands that Iran's considerably larger population can withstand a war of attrition against the much smaller Iraq. So the dictatorship conducts a propaganda effort targeting at the poor and uneducated to persuade Iranians to join the military. It continues to fight by sending wave after wave of young Iranians to their deaths on the battlefield. As Marji points out, the regime also utilises the cover of the conflict and the nationalism that it fosters to shore up support and crack down on its critics. The Iranian regime's terrible cannibalising character is best summed up by a part of the regime's own propaganda that appears multiple times throughout the story: in order to die as a martyr, one must inject their own blood into society's veins.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research endeavors to unravel the rich layers of Sahar Khalifeh's "*The Inheritance*," examining its cultural, political, and identity-related themes. By shining a spotlight on the role of translation, we intend to contribute to a better understanding of how literature acts as a bridge, crossing cultural barriers and sparking a global conversation about the universal human experiences embodied in Khalifeh's masterwork. Satrapi chronicles the story of her life in Tehran from the ages of six to fourteen through striking black-and-white comic strip visuals, a time that saw the overthrow of the Shah's dictatorship, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastation of war with Iraq. Lamis, the novel's central character, is beautiful, sweet, and brave. She recently divorced her husband. An Iraqi immigrant in Beirut is pushed into marrying a wealthy older guy in order to save her family from destitution. They relocate to London, and

after nine years and a son, she seeks freedom

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